



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Telephone Surveys and Your Health*

*Surveillance of Certain Health Behaviors Among States and Selected Local Areas*

*— United States, 2005*

Recorded: June 12, 2007; posted: June 15, 2007

**[Announcer]** *This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

Essential to CDC's work is identifying trends in health. One way CDC collects health information is by conducting random telephone surveys of the American public. Dr. Lina Balluz from CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion is with us today to discuss one of those important surveys, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System or the BRFSS. Dr. Balluz and her colleagues have just published an article that discusses how these surveys are done and why they are so important. Welcome to the show, Dr. Balluz.

**[Dr. Balluz]** Thank you, Matthew. It's a pleasure to be here.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Br. Balluz, CDC plays an important role in helping local and state health departments learn about the choices people make that affect their health. It isn't just guess work when public health professionals learn about changes and trends in lifestyle choices and other health-related behaviors that can affect health. How does the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System or the BRFSS collect all of this health information?

**[Dr. Balluz]** BRFSS is the largest, continuously conducted telephone survey. It's conducted in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. Interviews are conducted with adults, 18 years and older, and the questions focus on risk behaviors, chronic conditions, disabilities, injuries, and some communicable diseases.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** It seems that doing telephone interviews would be time consuming and might require specialized training. So who's actually on the other end of the line, talking with the public?

**[Dr. Balluz]** Interviewers are all trained to ask questions in a uniform way, so that data can be compared among states; and all states use the CATI system, which is a computer assisted telephone interviewing software. The interviews usually take between 20 and 30 minutes, and phone calls are made all week long, including weekends (daytime and evenings).

Each state completes hundreds of interviews each month, which resulted in approximately 350,000 interviews per year, nationwide.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** What are some examples of the kind of trends that you and your colleagues learned from the survey?

**[Dr. Balluz]** The survey provided information on the prevalence of access to care; obesity; immunization and other preventive services; and changes in risk behaviors, such as diet, physical activity, smoking, drinking.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** It sounds like the BRFSS brings in massive amounts of information. Once you have all that data, how is it used?

**[Dr. Balluz]** The information is used to identify groups of people at high risk for certain diseases or death or injuries. It's also used to spot trends in risk behavior and develop strategies and programs to target these trends. The information can be used in health planning and in developing targeted prevention programs. Also, it can be used to support any changes in health policies, such as smoking in restaurants or workplaces.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Well, clearly the BRFSS is an important resource for CDC and for state and local health departments. It's also easy to see how important it is to health promotion and disease prevention. Considering that your information shapes important policies, do you have recommendations for our listeners?

**[Dr. Balluz]** Yes, and not only yes to the fact that BRFSS is a very important source of information, but "Yes" we hope is the answer the listener will give when she or he is asked to participate in BRFSS. If you want to get more information about the health survey, and to get some examples of how the health information is used, you can go to [www.cdc.gov/brfss](http://www.cdc.gov/brfss) for more information.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, Dr. Balluz.

**[Dr. Balluz]** It's my pleasure. Thank you.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

**[Announcer]** *To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*